
Burgassi, Valentina, George Alexander Said-Zammit, and Valeria Vanesio (eds.), *The Land and the Cross. Properties of the Order of St John Between the Centre and Periphery (16th-18th Centuries)*, London, Routledge, 2025, 270p. ISBN: 9781032154527. 133\$ 

I. Introduction: The Religion and the Land (*Emanuel Buttigieg* and *Rakele Fiott*). PART 1: POLITICS AND DIPLOMACY. 2. Serving the Convent: The commanderies of the Order of St John in the sixteenth century (*Anne Brogin*). 3. European dynasticism and Hospitaller interest: The Grand Priory of Castile and León at the end of the reign of Charles II of Habsburg (1679-1700) (*Roberto Quirós Rosado*). 4. The Order of the Knights Hospitaller: Wealthy landowners? (*Alain Blondy*). 5. In the shadows of Secularisation, Church policy and Febronianism. The transfer of the property of the *Societas Jesu* to the Bavarian Grand Priory of the Order of St John (*Thomas Freller*). PART 2: ARCHIVES AND INSTITUTIONS. 6. 'Per la distanza de' luoghi e per la varietà delle Nationi': People, properties and archival procedures of the Order of St John in the early modern period (*Valeria Vanesio*). 7. The Sicilian Priory of Messina and its commanderies from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century (*Fabrizio D'Avenia*). 8. The commanderies *de jure patronatus* in the Venetian Mainland from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century: Land, control and power (*Luigi Robuschi*). 9. Dispersed archives, authority control and the land surveys of the Order of St John of Jerusalem (*Daniel K. Gullo*). PART 3. PATRIMONIAL NETWORKS. 10. The Patrimonial network and heritage of the Order of St John in Portugal in the late medieval and early modern period (*Paula Maria de Carvalho Pinto Costa*). 11. Artistic landscape and visual memory: The Order of St John in the Crown of Castile (*Olga Pérez Monzón*). 12. The Order, its city, and its peripheries: Rural-urban dialectics in early modern Malta (*Daniel Borg* and *Christian Mifsud*). 13. The *cabrei* of the Order of St John in Malta as a means of communication to transmit power and material wealth (*George A. Said-Zammit*). 14. Hospitaller commanderies as an international phenomenon: The lens of architectural sources in the early modern Italian States (*Valentina Burgassi*). Afterword (*Victor Mallia-Milanes*).

The Order of St John, born over 900 years ago in Jerusalem, still functions today as a multifaceted institution, which demonstrates its ability to adapt to adversity and to the political events that dictated the transfer of its headquarters from Jerusalem to Acre, Cyprus, Rhodes, Malta, Sicily, Ferrara and finally to Rome.

As written in the very beginning, "this book seeks to provide [...] a variegated Hospitaller landscape from Portugal to Italy and from Germany to Malta in the early modern period" (p. i). It is, indeed, groundbreaking, asserting itself as a novelty in that it brings together, in a single volume, studies of realities that are so far apart and sometimes so different, giving the reader an overall view.



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In the Introduction, entitled “The Religion and the Land”, Emanuel Buttigieg and Rakele Fiott (pp. 1-17) defend that the “Land” should not be seen only as a source of revenue, but it represented also an intimate bond between the Order and the donor families and as a link between the Hospitallers and the inhabitants of their properties. Therefore, it assumed not only an economic dimension but also a social one.

The “Land” also signified commanderies and bailiwicks with an intense social and religious life, where tradition stood with novelty. The land meant business and administration, politics and diplomacy, familiar and social networks, built heritage, and religion. And religion is also the “Cross”. The cross as martyrdom and as a salvific symbol. And the eight-pointed cross is transversal to all dimensions of the Order of St John. It is represented on the knights’ robes, on administrative and religious buildings, on everyday objects and apparel.

The book under review is divided into three parts, addressing it in a chronological approach. The first, dedicated to politics and diplomacy, features contributions from four authors. Anne Brogini (pp. 21-35) starts with an overview of the commanderies of the Order in the 16th century, addressing it from the original perspective of incomes for serving the central convent in a context of war in Europe and the Mediterranean. Robert Quirós Rosado (pp. 36-48) defends the interest of the Grand Priory of Castile and León in the final years of the reign of Charles II of Habsburg. Alain Blondy (pp. 49-59) studies the loss of income for the Order after the French Revolution, and Thomas Freller (pp. 60-73) gives a perspective on secularisation, Church policies and Febronianism and how it affected the Order of St John in the late 18th century.

The second part is dedicated to archives and institutions, with the collaboration of another four authors. Valeria Vanesio (pp. 77-92) offers a singular approach to how the Order, in the 17th and 18th centuries, profitably managed its territorial possessions in such a diversity of Nations, dealing with the variety of local laws and customs and specific archival practices to ensure the preservation of records. Fabrizio D’Avena (pp. 93-105) studies the commanderies of the Sicilian Priory from the 16th century, when the Order held an extensive patrimony, to the 19th century, when both jurisdictional and patrimonial strength were lost due to political events. Also, Luigi Robuschi (pp. 106-117) discourses on the commanderies of the Order, but under a particular focus: those *de jure patronatus* in the Venetian mainland from the 16th to the 18th century. These commanderies seem to have been established after the relocation of the Hospitallers to Malta, as a possible solution to the need for distributing benefices pressured by the Catholic dynasties. Daniel K. Gullo (pp. 118-131) brings a thorough evaluation of cataloguing multiple libraries, archives and museums from different countries in his text “Dispersed Archives, Authority Control and the Land Surveys” of the Order of St John. The Malta Study Center at the Hill Museum & Manuscript Library (HMML) was confronted with the problem of identifying the administrative organisation and multiple institutions of the Order when creating an online database in 2016, due to the aforementioned diversity of provenances.

The third part deals with patrimonial networks, with texts by five authors. Paula Pinto Costa (pp. 135-151) presents an updated state-of-the-art on the heritage of the Order of St. John in Portugal in the late medieval and early modern period, specifically the commanderies’ network, which held an added value to the Order itself, which esta-

RECENSIONES

blished specific instructions and rules for their management as they were appealing for many motives. Olga Pérez Monzón (pp. 152-169) offers the reader the artistic impressions and the visual memory left by the Order of St John in the Crown of Castile but emphasising the difficulty of identifying the Order's legacy in the territory, due to many factors. Daniel Borg and Christian Mifsud (pp. 170-188) studied the rural-urban dialectics in early modern Malta after the arrival of the Hospitallers to the island in 1530. This event was so decisive that it marked the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of the modern era in the history of the island. The transformations on the island should be analysed not only through financial and economic gains, but also in terms of socio-political affiliations. George A. Said-Zammit (pp. 189-207) studied the *cabrei* of the Order as a means of communication to transmit power, authority and wealth. These reports, meant to serve as official records, also functioned as a means of propaganda within the political agenda of the time. Last, Valentina Burgassi (pp. 208-228) delves into the architectural heritage of the Order in the Italian states during the early modern period, when the commanderies played a leading role in funding the construction of Valletta in Malta, and also helped to maintain political control over the Order's possessions. The land surveys, or *cabrei*, reveal the knights' territorial power, allowing researchers to establish hierarchies among commanderies.

The Afterword (pp. 230-236) is signed by Victor Mallia-Milanes. The author explores the concept of 'land' in its many dimensions and interactions —geography, language, and culture. The land gave the Order stability, security, comfort and survival. But it also caused anxiety when military and religious conflicts arose. And so, the title is justified: the Land and the Cross. Sacrifice and reward.

But this book, one of the most recent volumes of the series *The Military Religious Orders: History, Sources, and Memory* —this work was supported by FCT - Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia, I. P., by project reference UIDB/04059/2020, which began in 2019 and has already published 16 volumes— is much more than the Order of St John or the Hospitallers. It intends to reach those who are interested in the wider field of the study of land and property management in the modern period in its multiple manifestations: politics, culture (archives and heritage) and society. It is therefore a must-read book for historians and researchers of this area.

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